Joint Policy Committee/Regional Planning Program

Date: January 11, 2006

To: Joint Policy Committee

From: Regional Planning Program Director

Subject: 2007 *FOCUS* Program

In the Spring of 2006, the Bay Area, with the assistance of a state grant, commenced a multi-agency regional planning program called *Focusing Our Vision*, now more easily referred to simply as *FOCUS*. *FOCUS* builds upon a rich legacy of recent Bay Area regional planning efforts, in particular:

- *The Smart Growth Strategy / Regional Livability Footprint Project* and its "Network of Neighborhoods" regional vision;

- *The Smart Growth Preamble and Policies* adopted jointly by four regional agencies in 2002;

- The Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) and Housing Incentive Program (HIP) initiatives;

- The smart-growth-policy-based *Projections 2003, 2005, and 2007;*

- The Transportation and Land-Use Platform in the 2005 Regional Transportation Plan, *Transportation 2030*;

- The Resolution 3434 Transit-Oriented Development Policy.

However, *FOCUS* recognizes that none of these efforts, either individually or collectively, is complete and perfect; that regional planning is a continuous learning process subject to constant refinement and improvement. As well, even the best plans are only as good as their implementation.

The principal improvement which *FOCUS* seeks at this time is greater buy-in among local governments. Local governments, through land-use planning and development controls, are the main determinants of how the Bay Area grows. Yet too many of those powerful entities feel (rightly or wrongly) excluded from the regional planning process and uncommitted to a collective vision for the Bay Area. By building a series of voluntary compacts relative to mutually agreed Priority Areas—and by demonstrating success in realizing the potential of these areas through both regional and local efforts—*FOCUS* hopes over time to help remove the walls which currently separate regional and local objectives.

While *FOCUS* is still not even a year old, the beginning of a new calendar year is an appropriate time to generally assess learning so far and to plot out next steps. This memo and the ensuing JPC discussion are intended to contribute to those purposes.

The Limitations of Regional-Level Mapping

With a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), composed of local-government professionals from all nine counties, regional staff has spent much of the initial *FOCUS* effort on developing, testing and implementing a regional mapping model for identifying potential Priority Area locations. Regional staff has assembled information from a variety of sources and constructed about four dozen individually mapped data layers for the entire region. Staff has also devised a graphic methodology for weighting data layers and interactively combining them in order to explore a variety of alternative value scenarios. The JPC was introduced to this technical capability at its September meeting.

Staff and the TAC have used the new mapping facility to mix, match, meld, and blend (as well as slice, dice and puree) complex data in a variety of ways to see what they revealed about the most appropriate areas to prioritize for regional development support. A comparable effort is underway with an open-space coalition, GreenVision, to identify potential priority areas for conservation. However, this effort is evolving at a different pace and is not yet ready to report conclusions.

The interactive mapping effort has resulted in some revealing, colorful and graphically stunning maps—each accompanied by detailed, but largely invisible, data tabulations. We have learned a great deal about the region; and the mapping/modeling capacity, including the underlying detailed data layers, will be immensely valuable as we move forward on *FOCUS* and other regional planning efforts.

However, we also discovered that it is possible to have too much information come into play at one time. Some of our more complex data models served more to confuse, obfuscate and confound than to illuminate. Too many layers combined with complex weighting schemes tended to separate us from the key policy variables that really mattered from a regional perspective.

Therefore, with the Technical Advisory Committee, we decided to concentrate on a simple map which was based solely on the most important regional policy considerations. The resultant map, which will be before the JPC at its January meeting, identifies potential priority locations which are (1) within existing communities; (2) near fixed transit; and (3) within areas where jobs exceed employed residents. Not only are these three key policy considerations powerful within their own right, they are also highly correlated with other lesser regional concerns, so they can represent complexity without adding complexity.

The final map does not represent potential priority-area boundaries, nor does it identify potential or desirable development intensities. It only provides "signposts" or clues to where priority areas might be. The map is purposely composed of uniform dots, rather than real geographic areas, to signal its imprecision   It is our intention to define more precise boundaries and desired

development intensities directly with willing local government partners. We propose that no priority area be designated without agreement from the affected local government.

An Open Process

When we look at the final potential priority area map in detail, it also becomes readily apparent that it can only take us so far, and maybe not far enough. The three key policy considerations point to some obvious—and some not so obvious—places to locate priority development. However, we can readily notice that a more nuanced interpretation of regional policy would take us to a few more areas. We are also acutely conscious of the fact that we may not be aware of other local factors that could make some presently un-demarcated areas candidates for priority status, particularly with the appropriate investments.

We, therefore, propose that there be an open process allowing any local government to submit areas for priority-area consideration provided that these areas meet three basic entry criteria: that they be

1. Within an existing community;
2. Near existing or planned fixed transit (or served by comparably capacious bus service);
3. Planned (or planning) for more housing.

After entry, areas may be further priority-ranked by other criteria, including:

- The presence of multiple or mixed-uses contributing to a complete community;
- The presence of job concentrations, providing proximate employment;
- Circulation and connectivity.

Rather than impose standards top-down, we propose to refine all these criteria and their precise application in consultation with local governments over the next several weeks.

We also propose to discuss a possible hierarchy of priority "place types" with local governments, recognizing that not every place can be or wants to be like downtown San Francisco, but nevertheless could be a deserving priority for regional support. In addition, we would propose to differentiate areas based on their level of planning readiness. Those with plans and/or developments in place would be designated as Priority Areas; those requiring new or additional planning would be classified as Potential Priority Areas.

Once designated as a regional priority, an area would be eligible to apply and compete for regional incentives, as outlined in a companion memo to this one. Priority Areas would be eligible for capital funding. Potential Priority Areas could apply for planning funds.

2007 Milestones

To pursue the ideas and process outlined above, we propose a 2007 *FOCUS* program built around the following key milestones.

Mid-February through Mid-March	Outreach meetings to local elected officials and senior appointed officials in all nine counties to explain *FOCUS;* its relationship to other important regional programs, including RHNA, *Projections*, and the RTP; and the emergent opportunities for incentives
March-June	Meetings with individual local governments to explore priority development opportunities and parameters within their jurisdictions (Jurisdictions will be self-identified through the open process or solicited for participation because of their identification and ranking on the potential priority location map.)
April 19th	ABAG General Assembly to summarize conclusions reached through the earlier consultations, to explore the ways in which additional support can be provided (particularly from new state programs) and to kick off the formal application process for Priority Area or Potential Priority Area status
June 29th	Deadline for initial round of applications
July-August	Meetings between regional staff and applying local governments to clarify individual priority area parameters
September	Round of county-level meetings to vet priority areas and potential priority areas with public and stakeholders
October 18th	ABAG General Assembly to adopt initial set of priority areas as part of regional growth strategy based on *FOCUS*
After adoption	Applications for planning and capital incentives.

Parallel to this progression of milestones, staff will work internally and with the state to pin down a program of incentives and an application process for those incentives.

This program is, of course, subject to modification as we meet with local governments and incorporate their ideas and concerns and as the state clarifies its intentions.

Recommendation

I RECOMMEND:

THAT the JPC endorse the process and general program as outlined in this memo as the basis for *FOCUS* activities in 2007.